Fourth Church Pulpit

LOVE'S WORK IN THE WORLD

John M. Buchanan

April 28, 1996

Eternal and Almighty God, we give you thanks for all your faithful people who have followed your will in a grand procession of praise throughout the world and down through the centuries, into our time and place. We hear their stories in the pages of scripture, in the records of history, in the recollections of our families and in our own childhood memories. As we remember these people, inspire us by your Spirit to join their ranks and follow our Lord through life, to be bold as they were, and brave as well, witnessing to your righteous truth and generous love. Give us grace, O God, that we will leave a legacy of faithfulness to encourage and challenge those who follow us along the way of discipleship; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

"Thanksgiving for Heroes and Heroines of the Faith"
Book of Common Worship
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

FOURTH
PRESBY
TERIAN
CHURCH
A LIGHT IN THE CITY

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago
John M. Buchanan, Pastor

Scripture
Matthew 5:13-16

"Let all ... be done in love."
I Corinthians 16:14 (NRSV)

Following the 11:00 a.m. service, we will dedicate our new Great Hall, beautifully recreated during our recent renovation and reconstruction project.

We have named the space Anderson Hall in honor of The Reverend Harrison Ray Anderson, the pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church from 1928 until 1961.

He and Mrs. Anderson are among the saints, the heroes and heroines, of this community. And part of our responsibility, as members of the community of faith today, is to remember and know those who have gone before, and who gave to us the example of their faith and commitment.

His family is here today. The Reverend Harrison Ray Anderson, Jr., Doris Anderson Drake and their children and grandchildren, sitting together in pew 14, where Mrs. Anderson, Doris, Lad and the late John Anderson sat for years. Today there are children, grandchildren, sons and daughters-in-law and a wonderful new great-granddaughter and several Associate Pastors who worked with him. Later in the service Dr. John M. Mulder, President of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, will share some reflections on Harrison Ray Anderson as pastor, leader and mentor. John Mulder's family and the Andersons were close friends. John's father, the late John Mulder, was Clerk of the Session during the Anderson years and worked closely with him to lead the church.

I am delighted that John Mulder can be with us today. He is, himself, an important Presbyterian leader, educator, and a son of this congregation.

Harrison Ray Anderson was a distinguished pastor and a strong leader. I am the privileged heir of his work and ministry, and of Elam Davies who followed Anderson. I never met Anderson but when I was a new pastor serving a small church 25 miles south of here in the Calumet region of Northern Indiana, and wondering what this new life was all about, and how to be a minister, I used to wait for and eagerly read a column in one of the journals I took, *The Presbyterian Outlook*. It was written by Harrison Ray Anderson and in it I learned to respect his world view, his pastoral focus, his affection for his congregation and the life of the city, and the confident way he always talked about the role of the church, corporately, and Christians, individually, in the world.

Anderson was an activist. His vision for this church and for the Presbyterian Church, was one of aggressive confrontation with and involvement in the world. He probably never used the word, but Anderson's religion was "interactive"; his objective for the church was relevance and over the years of his ministry, as a leader in the national Presbyterian family, as a citizen of this community, and as the pastor of this congregation, this community of faith, Anderson's religion was always lively, on the cutting edge, informed, zesty, salty.

Anderson's legacy to his successors, and to all the people of Fourth Presbyterian Church, is a style of being a Christian church that does not shrink from, and indeed seeks for occasions to be public, to speak a word of truth and to demonstrate the compassion and love of God in this world. It is a particularly Presbyterian characteristic: to be public about our faith: to insist that religion and life connect and that faith inform and sometimes critique the life of the world. Anderson beautified the building, the ivy and the irises in the garth are his. The glorious east window was installed during his ministry, a gift of Cyrus McCormick in memory of his mother, Nettie Fowler McCormick. And he never wavered from his insistence that the church's purpose for being was its mission to its neighborhood and to the world. As the depression forced churches to economize and cut back programs and staff, Anderson insisted that Fourth Church continue to look outward and support Presbyterian mission. Under his vision the Deacons started to look at the community as their mission field, providing milk for neighborhood children and families. "The glory of this church," he said on the 65th Anniversary of the congregation, "is not what it has but what it gives."

He was not shy about speaking from the pulpit about social, economic and political matters. His own political preferences were, I am told, transparent revealed by his appointment as chaplain to the 1952 Republican Convention. But his theology was inspired more by the spirit of Christ than partisan ideology. Both General Eisenhower and Governor Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate, worshipped here and heard his preaching. He was a strong and early advocate of the United Nations. He addressed economic issues and confronted McCarthyism in 1953 in a sermon, "The Danger of Demagoguery" which must have raised eye brows and blood pressure in the pews that morning.

He persuaded his Session, not exactly a body of political and social liberals, to take positions on community issues, on the quality of motion pictures, the bars on Rush Street, in opposition to the lottery and in strong support of police reform in Chicago in 1960, at the end of his ministry.

One time Jesus told his friends and followers, "You are the salt of the earth." Those words have been worn smooth over time. But I have concluded that they were stunning, startling words when he said them. He wasn't addressing the social and political elite, after all. You could understand him saying it to the religious and political hierarchy of the nation. But these were the fishermen, ordinary people, the nobodies, who had taken to following him around Galilee.

A fundamental issue for followers of Jesus twenty centuries ago was how to live in the world with their new faith. He had assured them that regardless of whatever else was true about their lives, they were living in God's kingdom, where God's reign, God's love and compassion and justice were the operative realities, and that nothing in the world would ever separate them from God's love. The questions was how to live it.

There were two options so far as they could see. The first was to become even more zealous in the practice of their religion, obeying the religious law more zealously, fast, tithe, observe the rituals, and high holidays. He was a faithful Jew, but this style was not his. The second option was to pull back from the world into a secret society where the new realities of God's kingdom could be celebrated and lived. There was an intriguing and attractive example which we now know they probably knew about. It was to form a kind of cloistered community apart from the world; self-contained, separated intentionally and dramatically from life. There was one in fact, and they would have known it. Down on the Dead Sea at Qumran, an extensive monastic community where people lived together, practiced an intense and ascetic form of Judaism. The people of the community called themselves "children of the light." All the rest, of course, were children of darkness. We know them as Essenes. Their copies of scripture and the rules of their community were hidden in caves and discovered in 1947 — we know them as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. They invented a careful, disciplined communal life in their compound, practicing their religion and waiting for the Messiah. What better way for the new friends of Jesus to hold on to one another and to keep faith with him?

That's the context which makes his words so startling. "You are the salt of the earth." Salt has value insofar as it is applied to and acts in its environment. Salt preserves, cleanses, enhances flavor. It is an action agent. It has no value until it is added to something.

It has always been the issue for the friends of Jesus. How to live faithfully in and with the world.

There have been moments in history when the issue has been sharply drawn, when the mandate to live out the love of Christ in the world became risky, dangerous even. In a controversial new book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen challenges the conventional notion that the Holocaust was planned and carried out by a relatively small cabal of fanatically anti-semitic Nazis. The author argues that it was the whole nation, that everybody knew something, and that incidents of opposition to the persecution of the Jews were rare because everybody more or less agreed with what was going on. Goldhagen has set off a furious debate on that subject. He indicts the Churches which quickly and too eagerly not only caved in but supported the Nazi regime. But in an extensive and careful review in the *New Yorker* Clive James objects and tells the stories of the few who did protest and object: the Swabian pastor who was brutally beaten and imprisoned for condemning Kristallnacht. The priest who closed each evening mass with a prayer for the Jews and was sent to Dachau. Clive James concludes:

"In Germany, everyone knew that hiding or helping Jews was an unpardonable crime, which would be punished as severely as an attack on Hitler's life. Why, Goldhagen asks, did the population not rise up? The answer is obvious because you had to be a hero to do so." [*New Yorker*, p. 49, 4/22/96]

"You are the salt of the earth"

Sometimes the issue is sharply drawn. But mostly it is not. Mostly you and I are called to be faithful in less dramatic ways, but no less critical, and it begins, I think, in our hearts with the basic, bedrock commitment to love God and to follow Jesus by living thoroughly in the world. And it proceeds as you and I commit ourselves to being the active agents of the love of Christ in all our relationships, all our involvements, all our professional and leisure activities.

"Let all be done in love," St. Paul advised the early Christian church in Corinth. Love he had already defined: kind, patient love that pours itself out for others, love strong enough to bear and believe and hope and endure all things."

In an essay in the *Christian Century*, Peter Marty, a Lutheran minister and yet another talented member of the Marty family, tells about St. Anthony's Catholic Church in San Francisco where, for years, meals have been served to people in need, no questions asked.

"Over the doorway to its dining room the church has posted a sign bearing the inscription *Caritate Dei*. One day a young mechanic, just released from jail and new to St. Anthony's, entered the door and sat down for a meal. A woman was busy clearing the adjoining table. 'When do we get on our knees and do the chores, lady?' he asked. 'You don't,' she replied. 'Then when's the sermon comin?' he inquired 'Aren't any' she said. 'How about the lecture on life, huh?' 'Not here.' she said.

"The man was suspicious. 'Then what's the gimmick?' The woman pointed to the inscription over the door. He squinted at the sign. 'What's it mean, lady?' 'Out of love for God' she said with a smile, and moved to another table." [*Christian Century*, 4/17/96, p. 427, "The Door to Abundant Life," Peter M. Marty]

For 20 centuries, Christian faith has been conveyed from generation to generation. For 2,000 years Christian people have been the salt of the earth.

How it has happened — this remarkable communications from generation to generation of Christian faith has not been a merely academic enterprise.

It has been a matter of lives lived in faith: of faith lived out in the world; of children seeing their parents and grandparents — of younger brothers watching older sisters, and younger sisters watching older brothers; of congregations seeing pastors and leaders live it; of all of us, seeing the great examples of faith, of being inspired by and strengthened by the faith of our heroes and heroines.

Religious faith is taught and conveyed like that: experienced, witnessed in the lives of others.

We honor one of them this morning, and as we do so, I invite you to remember your heroes — heroines: those who have shown you what faith is, have conveyed by their lives something of the truth of Jesus Christ.

And I invite you to consider a remarkable possibility: that you are a model of faith for someone: that how you live your faith will be conveyed, and will add to the strength and durability of someone's faith in the future.

"You are the salt of the earth," Jesus said.

"Let all be done in love," Paul said.

May you and I, recipients of that love and that mandate, live our lives, in our world, our communities, our families, our relationships, in faithfulness and courage — and love. Amen.